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Article

## Political Activity of Kwiek ‘Dynasty’ in the Second Polish Republic in the Years 1935–1939

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### Abstract

The coronation of King Janusz Kwiek, which took place in 1937, was meant to integrate the Romani elite in the interwar sociopolitical life of Poland. Unfortunately, the creation of a homogeneous and centralized Romani representation through the royal institution ended in a fiasco. Firstly, the centralized model of power was in conflict with the Romani nomadic system in Poland, which was based on a multitude of leaders, including women whose power resulted from hierarchical dependence. Secondly, it quickly became clear that from the mid-1920s onward, when the presence of Polish Romani in mainstream social life crystallized, there has been no bottom-up social initiatives promoting King Janusz Kwiek’s attempts towards sociopolitical reform. Therefore, the Romani population was not prepared for changes and no effective state coercive measures were created to enforce the introduction of the postulated changes. Thus, although the activities of both actors—the Kwieks and the Polish authorities—often had a facade character, consisting in more or less weak ‘governance’ of the Romani minority, their joint activity favored the political maturation of the Romani elite and its comprehensive development. This was despite of the many shortcomings of the close relationship between the Romani people and the Polish administration, as a result from the dictatorial rule in Poland at the time.

### Keywords

Gypsies; integration; minorities; Poland; Roma

### Issue

This article is part of the issue “Gypsy Policy and Roma Activism: From the Interwar Period to Current Policies and Challenges” edited by Elena Marushiakova (University of St Andrews, UK) and Vesselin Popov (University of St Andrews, UK).

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### 1. Introduction

Current research on the history of the Gypsies and their elite in interwar Poland is quantitatively modest (Ficowski, 1985, pp. 70–92; Gontarek, 2016, 2017a, 2017b; see also Barany, 2002, pp. 102, 257). Gypsy issues, as taken up in the context of historical sciences, have not been very popular, mainly because there is an unspoken belief among Polish historians that there are no sources to study this minority. While this is an erroneous view, it has nevertheless been a view shared, for many years, by most of the historical community, which led to a de facto exclusion of this minority group from historical research. There are three arguments for this exclusion: 1) the oral nature of the Gypsy culture and the nomadic lifestyle, which entails 2) the lack of written sources, and 3) the small percentage of Gypsies living in the Second Polish

Republic (1918–1939, about 30,000–40,000). The latter is, however, unclear, due to the lack of official state data.

As a consequence, there has not been any scientific work on the basis of historical sciences that would comprehensively discuss the basic problematics of the Gypsy population in the Second Polish Republic, i.e., 1) the number of its members, 2) its political, social, economic, and cultural life, 3) the Polish state’s policy towards the Gypsy population, 4) the Polish–Gypsy relations, and 5) anti-Gypsy attitudes, among others. It can be safely said that the history of Gypsies in the Second Polish Republic has thus far been almost a terra incognita. Therefore, any work on the above topics that presents a specific, well-described problem is valuable in this case.

The issue of the coronation of the Polish Gypsy King is part of the author’s research on the Gypsy elite in interwar Poland, and particularly focuses on the analysis of its

political activity. The coronation was the most important act for the central Gypsy power that was taking shape in the 1930s, which had far-reaching effects for the entire community. The main purpose of this work is to answer the question of why such an important event ended in complete failure and what consequences it caused.

It should be clarified that although many separate Gypsy groups lived with their elite in the Polish lands, there is no information in the Polish sources about a different form of Gypsy representation than that created among the Kalderash (subgroup of the Romani people). This is due to the fact that they were numerically dominated by other groups from the second half of the 19th century onward (Ficowski, 1965, pp. 66–71; Gontarek, 2016, pp. 147–148; Kwadrans, 2008, p. 56; Lechowski, 2009, p. 27; about other Gypsy groups in Poland, see Mirga & Mróz, 1994, pp. 107, 119–120). As we will discuss in the article, the kings (part of the Gypsy elite), came from the Kalderash community. They belonged to the Kwiek ‘family,’ although this belonging should not be understood literally. Many kings had no family connections with the royal Kwiek in spite of adopting the name, treating this procedure as necessary to obtain the respect of Polish Gypsies. For all Gypsies in Poland who recognised the need to have their own king, Kwiek meant almost the same as a king (member of the Kwiek dynasty), who owed proper respect and influence (Gontarek, 2016, p. 149). This royal tradition was derived from the period of the First Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth (15th–18th centuries), and proves that the influx of Kalderash respected the custom of electing a king as guarantee of their power’s legitimacy in Poland. It was ridiculed as a relic by the Polish annexationists in the first half of the 19th century (Gontarek, 2018, pp. 254–255; Mróz, 2015).

To better understand the importance of the coronation, it is also necessary to illuminate the general political background of the Second Polish Republic and the attitude of decision-makers towards minorities at the time. The political history of the Second Polish Republic was clearly shaped under the influence of two political currents: the nationalist rule (until 1926) and, after that, the so-called Sanation, which had its roots in the socialist tradition. However, this latter ideological formation underwent a serious and fundamental evolution in the second half of the 1920s: from egalitarianism to authoritarian elitism. The key figure and creator of the Polish version of moderate authoritarianism was the Chief of State and Marshal Józef Piłsudski who, in 1926, successfully organised a coup. After his death in 1935, the Piłsudski basis underwent another ideological transformation—the concept of state consolidation was slowly replaced by the concept of national consolidation, which led, among other things, to a strong discrimination against the Jewish national minority and a strengthening of nationalist tendencies. This ideological turn was confirmed in 1937 (Paruch, 1997; Sioma, 2010, pp. 85–101).

Anti-Gypsy laws were not implemented (as in Germany’s Third Reich) during this unfavourable time

for minorities, but police authorities, through a vagrancy and begging prohibition act from 1928, initiated an intensified fight against illegal Gypsy encampments, which had not previously been practiced on such a scale. The purpose of police actions was primarily to limit the migratory lifestyle of the Gypsies in Poland. These activities did not carry a racial overtone, but Gypsies began in practice to be discriminated, as a consequence of the increasing police repression (Janicka, 2019, pp. 465–495; Mościcki, 1927, pp. 1285–1288). An expression of these tendencies was, for example, the liquidation operation of illegal camps carried out in the autumn of 1935 throughout the entire Warsaw Province (“Rewizje w obozach cygańskich,” 1935, p. 5; see also “Wódz cyganów,” 1935, p. 7).

Therefore, the second half of the 1930s in Poland was a period of growth of nationalism, officially promoted by the state organs the Catholic Church, which led, among other things, to the well-studied pogroms against Jews (who constituted about 10% of the total population). This was also due to the fact that hostile nationalist tendencies towards minorities were popular in the Catholic society, which constituted the vast majority, and which succumbed to xenophobic slogans (Chojnowski, 1979; Kijek, Markowski, & Zieliński, 2019). Certainly, in the future, detailed studies are also needed about the impact this situation had on the location of the Gypsy masses residing in Poland, and how Polish–Gypsy relations were then shaped.

Thus, a combination of factors (i.e., political changes towards repression and oppression affecting other groups, such as the Jews or the Polish political opposition, as well as the increase of nationalism and lack of tolerance in Polish society), led to a ‘sort out’ of the Gypsy cause in the Second Polish Republic, resulting in the coronation of Janusz Kwiek in 1937 as Gypsy king in Poland. It was a top-down and state initiative, consulted with selected, licensed Gypsy representatives, whose goal was to create a uniform and centralised Gypsy authority, subordinate to the government (a reflection of the state’s dictatorial practices; Gontarek, 2017a, pp. 72–75).

## 2. Methodology

This article makes use of the methodology characteristic of historical research. Rejecting the aforementioned arguments of most Polish historians about the lack of sources for studying the history of Gypsies in the Second Polish Republic, it must be admitted, however, that there is a problem with these sources in concerning the inter-war period. Firstly, they are scarce compared to sources that provide insight into other minorities. For this study, we prioritize press rather than archival sources, as the former is more available than the latter. Secondly, while some documents about the Gypsy population are represented in the archives, the history of the Gypsy elite is almost exclusively present in press sources, an extremely dispersed material which requires exhaustive and time-consuming queries to find relevant information.

Taking this into consideration, the method of selection in as follows: Firstly, the most important press titles of all political ideologies were reviewed, at the same time diagnosing their method and style of transferring the information about the Gypsies and the Gypsy elite. This allowed an overview of Gypsy narratives at the time. It turned out that government newspapers (especially *Ilustrowany Kuryer Codzienny* [IKC]) not only devoted most of the attention to Gypsy elite, but also set the tone for its discussion, sometimes publishing content about Gypsy representatives. Other non-government newspapers also picked up all this information, rarely creatively developing Gypsy topics. The regional press was also examined, selecting two press titles from each voivodeship (unit of basic territorial division of government administration). The analysis of these materials turned out to be necessary, because the regional press created its relatively autonomous image of the Gypsy representation. This method of selection prevented a selective and exclusionary (and in consequence, untruthful) image of the Gypsy elite. Of course, not all press articles were used—the best press representation was selected.

### 3. Grassroots Attempts to Build a Central Gypsy Representation: Reunions in Żabie and Rivne

To better understand the circumstances of the formation of the Gypsy representation in Poland in the second half of the 1930s, we should first pay attention to the so-called Eastern Borderlands of the Second Polish Republic, especially their southern part. From the early 1930s, this proved to be the area where the Gypsy cause was internationalised, precisely because several Gypsy communities from the Kalderash group met there—especially in the outskirts of the city of Lviv, where Gypsies coming from the Balkans and Romania made their first stop in Poland (Ślebodziński, 1937, p. 555; see also “Pięciu kandydatów do,” 1936, p. 8). They mainly discussed the issue of the emergence of the Gypsy state. A pioneer in discussions was Józef Kwiek, elected king in Katowice in 1934. He was a milkman by profession and, as his daughter, a graduate of a Bucharest junior high school. In Lviv, he managed the Christian Hygienic Dairy (“Król mleczarzem,” 1935, p. 6). His adversary to the royal title in the southern Eastern Borderlands was more commonly known as ‘Gypsy cresus’ from Trutnov (currently Hradec Králové, in Czech Republic). Both of them fought for influence at the Gypsy congress in Żabie (currently Verkhovyna), gathering several thousand Gypsies (Stanisławów voivodeship), which took place in November 1935 (“Cyganie wybierają,” 1935, p. 141).

The course of the reunion in Verkhovyna, taking place in an international atmosphere, and the increasing national tendencies among the Gypsies led the Gypsy elite to bring their aspirations and unification projects to an international level. To this end, in 1936, another congress of all world leaders was planned in Rivne (Stanisławów voivodship, nowadays in Ukraine) in order to elect a

global Gypsy leader. Organisational matters related to the preparation of the congress were dealt with by Józef Kwiek, president of the Council of Gypsies, and his son Doda. However, it was Basil Kwiek, the former Polish Gypsy king, who was promoted as the leader of Gypsies (“Wódz polskich cyganów konający,” 1937, p. 5). The Polish pro-government press emphasised the planned presence of the Brazilian Gypsy representation in the person of Fitulesko Kwiek, as Doda was to marry his daughter—who responded kindly to this initiative. One of the IKC columnists, Dr. Stanisław Peterz, also wondered why the Polish Gypsy community chose this city for the congress. Although he could not indicate the reasons behind it, he looked favourably at this Gypsy initiative. Treating this event with due seriousness, almost as the beginning of changes in the Gypsy community, he wrote: “The election of the All-King of Gypsies in Rivne will be the beginning, and Rivne will occupy a prominent place in the history of Gypsies. Will it be bad for Rivne? Certainly not” (“Echa wczorajsze,” 1936, p. 2; “Zjazd cygańskich monarchów,” 1936, p. 9).

A completely different position on this matter was presented by the administrative authorities (eldership), which probably carried out the political will of the government at which the ‘right turn’ was taking place at that time, including the strengthening of authoritarianism. Therefore, the eldership’s interest was primarily the control of the Gypsy representation and the care of the congress, especially since the venture was accompanied by international interest. It can be assumed that the congress was not at the hand of the Polish political elite, as it was difficult to control the internationalisation process. That is why the governor of Rivne announced that he would allow the congress if it was agreed upon by baron Matejusz Kwiek—Chief of the Gypsies, permanently residing in Warsaw. The latter, however, was unfavourable to the idea, stating that he would not give such consent, which meant that the prospect of the reunion was falling short and the grassroots Gypsy initiative had less chance of success (“Komplikuje się sprawa cyganów w Równem,” 1936, p. 8).

The reference to Matejusz indicates that, already at that time, the authorities opted for one, licensed Gypsy leader, and not for many Gypsy leaders as in previous years. This leader was empowered, although informally, to represent all Polish Gypsies. According to authorities, Matejusz was ideal for this function. Implementing settlement projects in the early 1930s, together with the authorities, he took the most loyal position towards the Second Polish Republic among all other Gypsy leaders. He was also an educated person who directly modelled himself after J. Piłsudski and, as a Spaniard, Francisco Franco. Furthermore, he proclaimed himself a commander rather than a Gypsy king, in accordance with the chief tendencies present among Polish political elites (Gontarek, 2017b, p. 17).

In addition to political decisions that blocked the Rivne congress, other events ultimately led to the cancel-

lation of the congress. These included the death of the Brazilian king on his way to Poland. In result, Józef Kwiek announced that, after a month of mourning, from May 1936, he would make efforts to move the entire event to Brest, i.e., to a completely different region, although still in the borderlands of the Second Polish Republic ("Wódz polskich cyganów konający," 1937, p. 5).

Another death also diverted attention from the international Gypsy congress: namely, the death of Matejasz Kwiek who, according to *IKC*, passed away after an unfortunate shooting incident in March 1937. Over 7,000 Gypsy mourners came to his funeral in Warsaw (Ficowski, 1985, p. 100; "O zabójstwo Bazylego Kwieka," 1937, p. 4; "Umarł król Kwiek," 1937, p. 2)

#### 4. The Creation of a Licensed Gypsy Representation: The Coronation of 1937 and a Wave of Criticism

When Matejasz died, an excellent excuse appeared, from the Polish authorities' point of view, for choosing a new Gypsy representative. This was despite the fact that, according to *IKC*, none of his competitors formally recognized Matejasz as having a monopoly over the management of Gypsy affairs in Poland. For this reason, as can be derived from subsequent press releases, it was decided to organise a formal suppression of a Gypsy leader to dispel doubts as to who would be the real leader. Matejasz's death, of course, boosted his competitors. In April 1937, the press reported, for example, about Basil's eagerness to support his candidacy among the Gypsies from Polesie. In Pinsk (now Belarus) he planned to gain their support to the throne. However, his voice was not heard ("Kandydat na króla cyganów," 1937, p. 9). After the death of Matejasz, the circumstances changes, and so did the priorities of the Gypsy leaders. The choice of a new Polish king holding decisive influence on most of the Gypsy community became the key issue, rather than far-reaching goals such constructing the state or the unifying the Gypsies.

Unfortunately, the subsequent course of events concerning the new congress took place under the overwhelming influence of the Warsaw authorities, despite the fact that the idea came, possibly, from the Gypsy elite residing in the capital, which, due to the scale of the venture, had to be in close contact with the administrative authorities. The latter, however, controlled and directed the whole event, preventing spontaneous and democratic actions, and determined in advance the outcome of the election. It was a completely different atmosphere than the one accompanying the preparation for the Rivne Congress, which was an exclusively Gypsy initiative, based on traditional meetings of Gypsies of different citizenship in the Eastern Borderlands. Thus, after some arrangements, in June 1937, *IKC* announced that the Gypsy congress would be held in the capital city, on July 4th. Thanks to a press release just outside the inn, we know who these conversations were with. Unofficially, the newspaper initially stated that Rudolf

Kwiek, brother-in-law of the late Matejasz, and Ryszard (Matejasz's son), were serious contenders to the throne. It has also been speculated that this issue had already been decided: Rudolf Kwiek was to receive the crown, and Ryszard the title of Gypsy chief. Another article lists the following candidates from the Kwiek 'family': Basil, Janusz, Michał, Rudolf and Sergius, and indicates that they had the best chance of being representatives of the Polish Gypsies led by Janusz Kwiek ("Kongres cygański," 1937, p. 6; "Kto będzie," 1937," 1937, p. 9).

The election attracted about 9,000 Gypsies from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary to Warsaw, but it did not occur with the expected seriousness and importance for a Gypsy event. However, on the one hand, it must be noted that the *IKC* called Gypsy leaders "politicians," suggesting that they were responsible for their kinsmen:

After all, no Balfour has ever acted on the Gypsy issue, as has already happened once on the Jewish question. This is explained by the fact that the Gypsies do not have sufficient authority. To the allegations of a moral nature, Gypsy politicians respond that horse thieves, that is, rustlers and violinists, are the exceptions among the Gypsies, and most deal with decent craftsmanship (cauldron making, blacksmithing, etc.). However, all attempts to stabilize this element have failed....In any case, the Gypsy issue is the most original minority problem in Europe. Will it succeed when this problem is definitely resolved—it's hard to say. ("Kto będzie," 1937, p. 9)

On the other hand, the election result was no secret, thus making it a facade. In fact, Janusz Kwiek was the one who was elected to that position. He also gave an interview, announcing that the royal title would be honorary, while, at the same time, stating that he saw his title as hereditary and intended that, in the future, he would transfer powers to one of his three sons (at the time, his eldest son was 13 years old and the youngest was 4). At the same time, yet completely unnecessary given the circumstances, some Gypsies wanted to use this opportunity and the excitement of the coronation to ask to be allowed the import of bears from Kaunas, Lithuania, which would be used for training. On the one hand, it made the Gypsy elite look like serious partners and, at the other hand, completely incompatible with civilized standards ("Kto będzie," 1937, p. 9; "Po obraniu króla," 1937, p. 12).

At the same time, readers were advised that the entire undertaking would be of a spectacular nature, an entertaining event in the case of the Rivne Congress. Nevertheless, it seems that, along with the decision to move the event to the capital, the discussion about the future of the Gypsy population was trivialised and shal- lowed, not mentioning the hoax which was the election itself. Emphasizing the entertainment nature of the announced event, *IKC* engaged in the promotion not only of Janusz Kwiek, but of the whole event that was



ticketed. Therefore, it was sometimes too pompous for the viewers to experience the charms of Gypsy folklore. Musical attractions, dance and the coronation itself were announced (the 'ancient royal ceremony'; ("W myśl prastarego," 1937, p. 9), as well as the participation of 27 Gypsy-elector senators and three senators, in addition to the clergy and the Orthodox choir. The choice of Orthodox clergy lays in the Romanian (most likely Orthodox) origin of the Kwiek dynasty (Klimova-Aleksander, 2018, p. 175; see also Kaminski, 1980, pp. 371–372). It was also mentioned that the event would attract the 38,000 Gypsies residing in the Second Polish Republic. The relationship with the ceremony itself was characterised by bordering the ridicule. In the presence of eminent personalities from the governmental sphere, priest Teodorowicz made a speech, ending with the following words:

We believe that choosing the king will serve to unite Gypsies from around the world and raise social, material, family and moral life to the heights....Be faithful to the Brightest Republic of Poland, which kindly permits the election of the Gypsy King in its capital, thereby showing honour to the entire nation. ("Cyganie wybrali," 1937, p. 8; Ficowski, 1985, pp. 101–102; "Janusz Kwiek został," 1937, p. 6; "W myśl prastarego," 1937, p. 9)

Due to the poorly conducted promotional campaign of the coronation, which merged two seemingly negative orders—political and entertainment-revised—societal reaction to the coronation was very critical, especially from the political opposition. The latter especially referred to the royal title itself, as being tyrannical and an anachronism ("Cyganie zarobią," 1937, p. 3; "Za mało im jednego króla," 1938, p. 2). Furthermore, even the magazine *Naokoło Świata* (Around the World), open to multiculturalism and promoting Gypsy culture in the Second Republic of Poland, could not resist highlighting the miserable artistic program that was presented during the coronation. It also denied that crowds have attended the event:

One saw...outside the group of senators, a few groups of Gypsies wandering and squirming on the pitch....Everything looked like an inefficient, hastily assembled nativity scene, which could have saved the good performance from the concert part. ("Jak było naprawdę," 1937, p. 19)

Thus, the negative reception of both the authorities and the Warsaw Gypsy elite was signalled in the press ("Jak było naprawdę," 1937, p. 19). Despite the first emerging critical voices after the coronation, *IKC*, on the 7th of July, continuing its bombastic-like style, defended Janusz Kwiek and asserted the importance of the event:

The wonderful coronation of King Janusz Kwiek will be told by mothers to their children and grandmoth-

ers to their grandchildren at bonfires scattered over the rivers of Europe. That is how Poland got entangled in the great legend of this strange nation of eternal vagabonds and the 'sworn' opponents of our civilization....The monarch had a hot time when he was freshly baked, when after a solemn coronation a crowd of domestic and foreign journalists besieged him. ("Cygańskie pokłosie koronacyjne," 1937, pp. 5–6)

At the same time, in the same article, it gently reacted to the criticism, openly noting that not all titles referred to the event with kindness. The newspaper first broadly referred to allegations that all accessories and gadgets, including the crown and coat, came from the Grand Theatre's rental shop and tried to present this fact as an interesting circumstance in which theatre and illusion "mix with life." Summing up the coronation aftermath, and wanting to explain support for the party, it wrote:

After all, what do we have to accuse the people who arranged for the king's election in Warsaw for? It is better that they have a king than to wander the world without feeling associated with any authority. However, some letters called the 'Gypsy coronation' a chutzpah! Huh! Maybe so! We will not run a tilt for Gypsy honour here, but we would like to defend the city theatres. ("Cygańskie pokłosie koronacyjne," 1937, pp. 5–6)

The mood that prevailed at this great coronation Gypsy fair was probably best described by Mr. Wojtkiewicz in *Kurjer Warszawski*, who wrote: "It was solemn and funny—pleasantly and randomly" ("Cygańskie pokłosie pokoronacyjne," 1937, pp. 5–6).

An additional unfavourable circumstance was the reaction of Western European media to the coronation, which was probably based on the fact that this exotic event created fantastic, untrue stories about the course of the Warsaw election. They have been denied in the Polish press, termed 'uncreated spoof' ("Krwawo-egzotyczne," 1937, p. 10). *IKC* cited, for example, the *Daily Mirror*:

After a night of terrible struggle in the dense forests that surround Warsaw, 30 000 gypsies smashed their tents here at dawn and gathered at the Military Stadium....6 people were killed, more than 30 wounded, when knives flashed and ambushes from the death spat during the night fight for the Gypsy crown. However, according to a report that appeared in *Central News*, 10 people were killed during the coronation ceremony. *IKC* summed up: To both correspondents...we are yielded with a sincere heart to go on vacation as soon as possible. Maybe the best somewhere around Tworek [psychiatric institution]. ("Krwawo-egzotyczne," 1937, p. 10)

Importantly, Kalderash Polish Gypsy communities joined the criticism, targeted against the government, Janusz Kwiek, and the idea of coronation. Actually, consciously or unconsciously, they stood up against the government, refusing to organise in such a way the internal life of Gypsies in Poland. The sharpest voice came from the lips of Matejasz's wife, Julia, who, during the interview given on 6th July to the *Morning Express*, described him as "a garbage collector" (Ficowski, 1985, p. 102), and also stated that Rudolf Kwiek, supported by Julia had to succumb to pressure in order not to compromise Gypsies on the eyes of the public. Aside from the speculations that Julia mentioned the pressure of the Polish authorities to withdraw any support for Janusz Kwiek, she also pointed to the machinations during the vote:

What voices were there! They did not even know how to sign. There was a line and a cross on the pages. Who would know there, whether it meant Janusz Kwiek or something else. ("Dziś w Warszawie," 1937, p. 4; Ficowski, 1985, p. 102)

Rudolf Kwiek's reaction was also very decisive and even radical—in anger, he planned to see what was organised in 1936 by Polish nationalists, committing anti-Semitic riots in the city of Myślenice ("Marsz 14 tys," 1937, p. 10).

The wave of criticism led to the fact that the newly elected king himself was, above all, ridiculed. To defend his own name, he hired the renowned Hofmokl-Ostrowski office to fight against the insinuations and accusations that had appeared. Although he informed the *IKC* himself, he was already far removed from the election, drawing up a kind of catalogue of disputed issues (i.e., harming the Gypsy opposition with Rudolf at the forefront, and the conflict with Julia Kwiek, who accused the king of threatening her with death and financial embezzlement over the distribution of income from the show) ("Kancelaria," 1937, p. 8; "Król cyganów zapowiada," 1937, p. 9; "Nowy król Janusz," 1937, p. 9).

The negative attitude of the Catholic Church had a decisive influence on the distance of power from the Gypsy coronation, as well as on the abandonment of the Gypsy issue, understood as part of the Sanation's concept of national consolidation. The authorities had to take his opinion into consideration because Poland was a Catholic country. Church hierarchies criticized participation in the event given the representation of the Orthodox clergy. This opinion, of course, also directly reviewed the recent zeal of the authorities to conduct such events. The Catholic Press Agency issued a press release expressing its surprise that the Orthodox clergy took the matter seriously and arrived in liturgical vestments for the event, sacrificing the theatrical crown: "Because it is hard to suppose that he consciously committed profanation of the Christian religious rite to the delight of the ungodly" ("Koronacja," 1937, p. 6). It was a very harsh judgment, and it concerned the clergy, the central authority and the Gypsies in equal degree, as the Catholic clergy refused

the Gypsies the right to sincerely profess the Orthodox faith, which proved the ignorance of the Catholic hierarchy ("Koronacja," 1937, p. 6). The position of the Catholic clergy is even more glaring because, in the second half of the 1930s, reports about the funerals of Kwiek appeared from time to time in the press, emphasising the fact that the conductors were headed by Catholic priests, a matter which did not cause any sensation ("Cygański pogrzeb w Bydgoszczy," 1938, p. 13; "Niezwyczajny pogrzeb," 1937, p. 9).

The official abandonment of the Gypsy cause by the authorities after the coronation fiasco manifested itself above all in scant information about it in the pro-government press, and as such, information about the subsequent activity of Kwiek is incomplete and certainly more modest than in comparison to previous years. Ficowski (1985, p. 103) signalled that the atmosphere that had prevailed in the final two years of the Second Polish Republic in the circles of the Kwiek clan was full of quarrels and disputes. He claimed that Gypsy leaders focused only on the fight for primacy over Polish Gypsies. In this way, the entire political project of 'ordering Gypsy life' was liquidated. Janusz Kwiek clashed with his two main opponents: Rudolf and Basil Kwiek. Their actions aimed at undermining the legality and legitimacy of the coronation. None showed any interest in the project to unite the Gypsy population and, even less so, in the idea of building their own state.

An in-depth query in the press materials showed that this was particularly the case in the first months after the coronation, up until autumn 1937. At that time, the anti-Janusz Kwiek opposition was extremely active in trying to regain influence, affected by the coronation project. Rudolf Kwiek, to strengthen his position, declared himself "the prime minister of a united Gypsy nation" ("Rewolucja wśród cyganów," 1937, p. 5), an expression of open rebellion. The legitimacy of the title would be reflected in new seal, with the inscription 'Rudolf Kwiek—President of the Council of Ministers of the United Gypsy Nation,' which he made for himself. He also conducted a campaign with Basil Kwiek to send emissaries to Gypsy camps to persuade these to declare obedience to the new king. At that time, the Polish Gypsy opposition also cooperated with Baron Stojka, who lived in Slovakia, and who sent a telegram to Janusz Kwiek, demanding that he fold the crown and convene the Supreme Gypsy Council. Because Janusz tried to conceal this message when this case came to light, he discouraged some of the Polish Gypsies ("Rewolucja wśród cyganów," 1937, p. 5).

The opposition, led by Julia Kwiek, also accused Janusz Kwiek of tolerating theft and other dishonesties of members of his community. Julia Kwiek decided to create at home an investigation office to look into the abuse and crime among the Gypsies subjected to Janusz Kwiek (it is worth mentioning that Julia resided in Warsaw in the Wola district at Dworska street, while Janusz Kwiek had his headquarters in 1937 in Grochów, Praga district).

Her activity in the context of the role of women in the Gypsy community is very interesting, and certainly requires in-depth queries in press materials. Although her leading activity as a Gypsy woman, Julia Kwiek was eloquent and unique on the eyes of the Polish at the time. She made mistakes in the fight against Janusz Kwiek because she began to draw ordinary members of the Gypsy community into the power struggle, dividing them into hostile factions. By attacking Janusz Kwiek and his Gypsies in this way, she wanted to direct the attention of the police to groups within Janusz Kwiek's sphere of influence, weakening his income from tributes and taxes derived from them, which he collected during regular Gypsy gatherings ("Cygańskie biuro," 1937, p. 7). The problem of unfair cooperation of Gypsy elites with police authorities, including paid agents, was raised by Ficowski (1985, p. 105), calling Janusz Kwiek a "pet of the Sanation police." The Kwieks' agents' work for the police was so strongly present in the Polish consciousness that one of the Polish newspapers published in New York during the war, describing the wartime fate of the King of Lviv, Stefan Kwiek, discussed his work for the investigating office in Lviv. The problem of cooperation arose because investigative offices, unable to control the nomadic way of life of Gypsies in Poland, tried to control this minority by various agent methods, unfortunately disintegrating it at the same time ("Losy polskich cyganów," 1943, p. 4).

In addition, during this period, Basil, who had a strong influence on the Eastern Borderlands, declared in Lutsk that Janusz Kwiek did not even have the right to bear the name Kwiek, because he had Greek citizenship. Basil Kwiek also announced a verification action aimed at separating the real Kwieks from those who had such a name illegally, and announced Basil's efforts to annul the coronation to state authorities ("Jeszcze jeden Kwiek," 1937, p. 8). All these activities certainly had a destabilizing effect on the Gypsy community, contributing to its even greater atomisation. Therefore, considering the Kwiek's declared prior aspirations of broad unification, the coronation turned out to be counter-effective.

A tangible manifestation of the coronation fiasco of 1937 was a full blockade by the authorities to organise such events in subsequent years. Janusz Kwiek was not allowed to renew the coronation, which the leader planned for the 7th of July 1938. It was to take place in Warsaw's Łazienki Park. It is significant that, in the meantime, Janusz and Rudolf Kwiek came to an agreement. As a 'prime minister,' Rudolf received messages announcing the arrival of delegations from Hungary, Romania and even Belgium. Their alliance was now threatened by the prowling Pomerania pretender, Michał Kwiek, another member of the clan. Rudolf also anointed the Gypsy leader in Poland, announcing that Gypsies should pay tribute to him, not in the capital, but in Pomerania—Gdynia. *IKC* reluctantly presented his efforts, and it resulted in the fact that the leader was not likely to have Polish citizenship.

As mentioned before, against the rightful king collides Michał Kwiek, also claiming to be the king. Not having permission to settle permanently, the self-proclaiming king spreads false news that Gypsies would gather at Pomerania to pay him tribute ("Hołd swemu królowi," 1938, p. 8; see also "15 tysięcy Cyganów," 1938, p. 5; "Cyganie zjeżdżają na elekcję," 1938, p. 6; "Rocznica koronacji króla cyganów," 1938, p. 9; "Walka o 'tron' cygański," 1938, p. 8).

So, both Janusz and Michał probably did not understand that the Polish authorities decidedly stop supporting and firming with their authority coronation conventions with a national dimension, resulting in the aforementioned abandonment of the Gypsy question. The organisation of the congress in Brest was refused to Basil, and Michał was also refused a congress in Świecie on Wda (region of Pomerania; "Król cyganów w Świeciu," 1938, p. 8; "Król cyganów, Michał Kwiek," 1938, p. 7; "Królowie cygańscy walczą o koronę," 1938, p. 8). The same occurred in 1939, when the prospect of a congress in Łódź appeared. *IKC* said that for this purpose, four Gypsies volunteered to the local township office with a request to designate a large square for the congregation. The officials refused, however, motivating disagreement by the lack of a proper square in the city. They also pointed to the threat to security and order in the event that large numbers of camps would come into the city. Not discouraged, the Gypsies announced that they would go to another centre ("Elekcja króla," 1939, p. 8).

The exception was Płock, where for generations Gypsies had organised conventions. In 1938, with the participation of 200 representatives of Gypsy families, the king of Polish, Hungarian and Romanian Gypsies was elected in the state forests of 'Góra,' near Płock. Paula Kwiek, the new leader, was unrelated to any of the famous Kwieks. The regional press informed that he came to Poland from Germany. His election as Gypsy leader shows how atomised the supremacy of the Gypsy community was at that time. The scale of the fragmented Gypsy leadership was in fact much larger than was shown by the nationwide press, which mainly lived with the clashes of great Gypsy leaders ("Sejm cygański pod Płockiem," 1938, p. 3). Along with the number of regional, lesser kings arriving in 1938–1939, all the wealth of the titles of their courtiers appeared. For example, in 1939 in Vilnius, a certain Jan Kwiek added his title in a false passport under the title "Diplomat of the Gypsy King Kwiek in Poland" ("Kandydat na króla w kryminale," 1939, p. 8).

A year before the outbreak of war, interest in Gypsy affairs and the Kwiek clan became a completely marginal issue. At the time, government and society lived in suspense, watching the development of political events that inevitably aimed at armed conflict. The last note in the pro-government press, which from 1926 set the tone for the Gypsy case, appeared in June 1939, three months before the attack of the Third Reich and the USSR troops on the Polish state, which initiated the outbreak of World War II. It reads as follows:



The camp in Przemyśl left for the Romanian border. The interior of the 'royal' tent was decorated with expensive tapestries, members of the Kwiek family were carrying themselves well, decorating their hands with wonderful rings. (Królewski obóz cygański," 1939, p. 10)

## 5. Conclusion

To sum up, the failure related to the coronation fiasco for both Polish and Gypsy political elites was of key importance for the Gypsy issue in Poland. The coronation project, which was supposed to be just an introduction to 'sorting out' the Gypsy issue, collapsed for several reasons. First of all, the undemocratic political conditions that determined the concept of election played a huge role—instead of a real congress and election of the real king, a government candidate was imposed from above, moving the centre of Gypsy life from Eastern Borderlands to Warsaw, contrasting to the location Gypsies themselves. Theoretically, the Polish authorities could enforce the orders of the new king but, quickly, almost a few days after the coronation, realized that its course and its facade character united almost all of them against Warsaw and Kwiek: political opposition, an increasingly nationalist society, and even journalistic circles, unfriendly towards the Gypsies. Some Gypsy leaders also revolted against the coronation fiction, who did not want to change the current model of exercising power by many local kings, leaders and chiefs (who were given different names), and certainly not by one person. For fear of losing their influence, they caused the intensification of often sterile factional fights between themselves. Therefore, the Polish authorities, ashamed of their idea and observing the growing dislike in society towards minorities, abandoned the Gypsy issue altogether, completely marginalizing it, which was ultimately determined by the position of the Catholic Church on the matter.

For the Warsaw Kwieks it was a double defeat. Firstly, the Polish authorities back-off, which had previously given them a relative sense of co-governance of Gypsy affairs since 1926, and, secondly, the idea of unification proved to be counter-effective, leading to chaos and even greater atomisation of local leadership. However, it is difficult to blame the Kwiek family in Warsaw, who was unlucky enough that the process of their maturing to participate in political and public life came at such an unfavourable time as the 1930s. Rather, all their efforts should be appreciated, because they managed to articulate Gypsy demands, in spite of unfavourable conditions. This is their greatest merit. In the end, their efforts led to the existence of the Gypsy representation, although it was not free from infirmities and various weaknesses.

It also relevant to mention that, unfortunately, the coronation also interrupted the naturally ongoing discussion process within the community, mainly around the issues of unification and the state-building, which was

demonstrated by the grassroots Gypsy initiative of the Rivne Congress.

## Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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